



LISTEN UP

Carlos Torrez, Ames Research Center
Transfer Wisdom Workshop November 7, 2001

Our division was under a hiring freeze and our workload was increasing. We had one person on staff who was rarely assigned work on high-profile projects because he was thought to be non-productive. I decided that it was time to bring this person out of mediocrity and into productive mode.

I believe that all people want to do well and want to succeed. I approached my manager with my thoughts about this. He laughed and said, "He doesn't have what it takes and won't change." I pointed out that if we did nothing, the workload would continue to rest on a few people and our best workers were likely to experience some form of burnout. I proposed that I become a mentor to this person.

I began by explaining that I wanted him to succeed. I spent a lot of time listening. Soon his work output and confidence began to improve. He came by and asked frequent questions and proposed possible solutions. This "problem employee" often solved his own problems as he spoke. By giving him the encouragement to extend himself and trust his judgment he seemed to blossom. He even went to my supervisor and asked for more challenging work!

My supervisor came by, excited, and said he had noticed changes and wanted to thank me for doing such

I TOLD HIM, "ALL I DID WAS PUT HIM IN TOUCH WITH HIS OWN POTENTIAL. HE DID ALL THE REST."

a fine job being a mentor. I told him, "All I did was put him in touch with his own potential. He did all the rest."

I learned much from this experience: Do not judge. Take time to know people and their dreams and goals. Listening is often more important than talking. •

TRUSTING THE ENEMY

Terri Rodgers, John Glenn Research Center
Transfer Wisdom Workshop May 2, 2002

The opportunity to manage a flight project came up and I was eager to see what that world was like—to actually see hardware fly. The only catch was that the opening occurred because the current project manager wanted out. It was too much work on top of his other workload, and the project scientist was driving him crazy.

Sure enough, as soon as I took the job, the project scientist started complaining all the way up to his management chain. We would be in a meeting and have to step outside to argue over some disagreement. Finally I decided, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." I started to listen closely to his concerns and realized that some were valid. I also started to recognize his strengths, and I capitalized on them. He was quite articulate and he was willing to share his ideas with an audience. I asked him to present a few charts at our monthly presentation to management. I also included him on the telecoms with our payload support managers at Marshall Space Flight Center and Johnson Space Center. These simple things gave him more insight into what was going on with the project, and they cost me nothing.



The project moved along and before too long our hardware was tested and ready to fly. It was time to present our work to management during a two-day review. The project scientist faded into the background because he trusted me to do my job. The first part went fine. I went home Friday evening, thinking about what I would say on Monday. But things didn't work out the way I planned. I was eight months pregnant, and I went into premature labor. I called work to say that I wouldn't be in on Monday.

When Monday came, the project scientist did a wonderful job presenting my charts—but not before praising me for the job I had done. This from a person, who looked more like an enemy than a friend when I first met him. You can go far when you reach out to "enemies" and listen. •